

**Testimony Regarding
H.B. 6880, An Act Concerning Assorted Revisions to the Education Statutes**

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Chairmen McCrory and Currey, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty, and distinguished members of the Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding H.B. 6880, An Act Concerning Assorted Revisions to the Education Statutes. My testimony specifically concerns Section 6 of the proposed bill, which would require the State Department of Education (SDE) to study the fiscal impact of implementing a school voucher program for private school tuition and fees.

The proposed voucher program to be examined by the SDE would divert Education Cost Sharing (ECS) funding from local and regional public school districts and allow those public, taxpayer dollars to go toward private school tuition. Our organization has significant concerns about accountability, transparency, performance, and equity with this section of the bill.

As private entities, nonpublic schools do not have to adhere to the same accountability and standards, reporting requirements, and regulations as local public schools and public schools of choice, such as magnet schools, charter schools, and AgriScience programs. Private schools do not have to adhere to the state's open meeting and open record laws, nor do they have publicly elected boards of education that answer to parents and community members.

In exchange for less regulations and more independence and autonomy, private schools do not receive public funds. That's the trade-off private schools agree to and understand. The voucher system proposed to be studied in H.B. 6880 would break this understood deal and flow public dollars to private schools without appropriately increasing accountability and transparency to match that of public schools. Without increased accountability and transparency how would student performance be accurately assessed and analyzed? How would taxpayers know how their hard-earned dollars are being spent? And how would the State ensure students' education and civil rights are being respected and upheld?

Additionally, private schools are not required to accept all students and may choose not to accept students with additional learning needs, such as students who require special education services. Allowing public dollars to funnel to private schools that are not required to follow the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a dangerous precedent and a step backward for equity in our state.

Lastly, recent research has shown that voucher programs have hurt student academic performance. Studies of voucher programs in Indiana, Louisiana, Ohio, and Washington D.C. have revealed students participating in the voucher programs experienced moderate to large declines in their performance on state tests and that those declines persisted.¹ As one researcher who has studied voucher programs for over 20 years wrote last July, “the research case for vouchers doesn’t hold up to scrutiny, while the research case against them has been flashing warning lights for almost a decade.”²

The staff of the SDE should not be mandated to use their limited time to study a voucher program that would be less accountable, less transparent, less equitable, and less successful. The voucher program outlined in Section 6 would not provide greater access to opportunities for Connecticut’s poorest and highest-need students, nor would it provide a pathway to greater academic achievement and better student outcomes. The voucher system proposed to be studied in this bill would simply be a taxpayer-funded subsidy for wealthier families who decide to send their children to a private school.

We urge the Committee to reject this proposal and instead work to advance education finance policies that are transparent, accountable, and provide all students with a high-quality public education that allows them to reach their full potential. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.B. 6880, and please feel free to contact me anytime should you have questions or would like to discuss this issue more.

Sincerely,

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About the School and State Finance Project

The School and State Finance Project is a nonpartisan, nonprofit policy organization that works collaboratively with policymakers, communities, and other key stakeholders to develop data-driven solutions that ensure all public school students receive equitable education funding that supports their learning needs.

¹ Barnum, M. (2020, February 21). Do school vouchers ‘work’? As the debate heats up, here’s what research really says. *Chalkbeat*. Retrieved from <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2017/7/12/21108235/do-school-vouchers-work-as-the-debate-heats-up-here-s-what-research-really-says>.

² Cowen, J. (2022, July 20). OPINION: After two decades of studying voucher programs, I’m now firmly opposed to them. *The Hechinger Report*. Retrieved from <https://hechingerreport.org/opinion-after-two-decades-of-studying-voucher-programs-im-now-firmly-opposed-to-them/>.